

[The Arizona Republic](#)

Art Thomason

The chairman of the U.S. House Aviation Subcommittee says Phoenix-Mesa Gateway Airport deserves federal help to meet the Valley's needs as a reliever airport and help reduce congestion at airports across the country.

U.S. Rep. Jerry Costello, D-Ill., made the assessment after he was introduced to Gateway this week by subcommittee colleague Rep. Harry Mitchell, D-Ariz., and committed his help to secure federal funding for the airport's dual role as the core of a new urban center and easer of crowded skies.

Costello came to the Valley to look at the infrastructure needs of Gateway and Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport.

"Seven airports in the country account for about 72 percent of the delays," Mitchell said after he and Costello toured Gateway with an entourage of airport executives, higher education administrators and local public officials.

With Sky Harbor as the nation's ninth-busiest airport for air traffic, the congressmen said they didn't want it to join airports that contribute to delays.

Relief from Gateway is the answer, they said, particularly when the Valley's growth continues to push Sky Harbor's passenger and congestion numbers higher.

The congressmen said both airports appear to be benefiting from collaboration between aviation officials from Gateway and Phoenix and from Gateway's governing board that includes members from Southeast Valley municipalities and Phoenix.

"I think the key to development of any airport is planning and they have done a very good job here," Costello said. "A lot of airports suffer from turf wars. That doesn't seem to be the case here with the partnership. Zoning ordinances and protections are in place so subdivisions are not coming up to runways."

"I'm committed to working with Harry and others to leverage federal funds to fit their needs," he added. "We have a responsibility at the federal level of enhancing and increasing their capacity."

By 2015, Mitchell said, the nation's airports will serve 1 billion passengers and that could be a conservative estimate.

"The FAA has already warned the Phoenix area will need significantly greater capacity by 2025

and I think Gateway is posed to provide some of that will reliever service," Mitchell said.

Cities and states, the congressmen said, cannot afford to fund major infrastructure needs at airports without federal assistance.

"This is a national aviation system," Mitchell said. "I have an obligation to see that the funds for our airports come here."